

## **Re-Booting Regional Planning in South East Queensland**

**Phil Heywood, Douglas Baker, and  
Bhishna Bajracharya**



**Urban Policy Program**

**Issues Paper 2  
November 2004**

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**The Urban Policy Program acknowledges the generous support  
provided by *Brisbane City Council* for production of the  
Program's Issues and Research Papers.**

**ISBN 1 920952 16 0**

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Griffith University  
Brisbane, QLD 4111  
[www.griffith.edu.au/centre/upp](http://www.griffith.edu.au/centre/upp)

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## **Introduction**

This Issues Paper presents the outcomes of a recent seminar which addressed the theme of 'Re-Bootting Regional Planning in South East Queensland'. The seminar was held at the Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, in June 2004. The seminar brought together a wide range of state and local government, community, private sector and scholarly participants, including members of the Urban Policy Program. This report provides an overview of the context for the seminar, the problems faced by the South East Queensland region which the seminar seeks to address and identifies outcomes and proposals for future directions arising from the seminar discussions.

## **The Global Context**

Regional planning and governance are attracting increasing attention throughout the contemporary world. There is widespread recognition that new approaches are needed to prevent rapid city growth from swamping outdated administrative boundaries (Self, 1982; Hall, 1988). Increasing technological impacts mean that environmental resources of land, air and water must now be managed throughout entire regional catchments. At the same time, emerging metropolitan economies must be nurtured if they are to be able to compete within the global economy. Methods of financing essential services and infrastructure must be found. Ways must be discovered to re-distribute windfall profits from speculative developments to support essential services and public life and space. Regional utilities of water and power must be made efficient and democratically accountable. Affordable housing needs to be integrated within systems of land development instead of being a cosmetic but resented add-on to affluent estates. Metropolitan and provincial centres need to be readily accessible and open to users by foot, pedal, car, bus, train and ferry. People should be able to filter and flow through regional cities like water through soil. Settlement forms should reflect people's needs for contact with each other, with nature, and with opportunities for choice. Regional landscapes should provide a green setting for cities, towns and suburbs at the same time as protecting natural habitats. Regional planning should create sustainable environments to integrate the different needs to survive and thrive of animals, plants and human communities.

Implementing such plans will depend upon efficient and responsible regional governance. Although worldwide such systems are still the exceptions rather than the rule, there are enough notable examples to encourage practitioners searching for viable models. Since 1970, Italy has benefited from a system of 20 regions, which have ensured stable environmental and economic conditions throughout a period of turbulent national politics (Putnam, 1992). In the Netherlands, the national Government is now channelling its funding for transport, housing and open space for Greater Rotterdam through a Regional Council that is composed of delegates from the constituent 20-30 local governments – a body very like Southeast Queensland's Regional Organization of Councils (SEQROC) (Van Schijndael et al, 2001).

In the UK, the national government has supported the creation of similarly composed Regional Assemblies, which are responsible for producing Regional Spatial Strategies, which will guide local government planning (ODPM, 2004). Since 1965, British Columbia has employed a system of Regional Districts, which are managed and controlled by their constituent local government councils to provide common services, which now include strategic planning. The most populous, the Greater Vancouver Regional District, has become a focus for worldwide attention as an example of successful evolutionary regional governance (Paget, 1995; Heywood, 1997). A few hundred miles to the south, the State of Oregon has for over thirty years bestowed upon the directly elected council of Metro Portland powers of regional planning, transport, open space management and economic development that are the envy of other metropolitan regions (Knaap and Nelson, 1992).

In 1992, New Zealand, having experimented for many years with the directly elected Auckland Regional Council, created a national system of regional governance, which combines district and regional councils (Bush 1989, New Zealand Government, 1993). Despite initial criticism, it is performing increasingly well (Tremaine & Wasley, 2003). Queensland is therefore not entering uncharted waters as the state searches for the promised land of effective regional growth management and conservation.

## **Background to this Paper**

How Southeast Queensland could best tackle these challenges was the subject of a seminar which forms the basis for this issues paper. The seminar was the most recent in a series of Regional Planning & Governance discussions organized in the past year by the Continuing Professional Development Program of the Queensland Division of the Planning Institute of Australia (PIA) and the Urban & Regional Program of the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) and sponsored by the Queensland Department of Local Government, Planning & Sport.

Held in the QUT Faculty of Built Environment and Engineering on June 11, 2004, the seminar was attended by one hundred and forty people and included keynote speeches from Mr Jim Soorley, the Lord Mayor of Brisbane from 1990 to 2003, and Mr Michael Kerry, a former Chief Planner for South Australia and Western Australia, and Brisbane City Council Manager of Urban Management, who has recently been appointed Director of the Queensland Government Office of Urban Management for South East Queensland. Panel presentations were contributed by Professor Peter Spearritt, Director of the Brisbane Institute, Dr Darryl Low Choy, Senior Lecturer in Environmental Planning at Griffith University and Mr Gary White, President of the Queensland Division of the PIA and Director of Planning for Ipswich City Council.

These seminars are intended to make professional contributions to the current debate over Southeast Queensland's mounting regional and metropolitan scale challenges. The outcomes of the first, held in September 2003 and entitled "Urban Sprawl or Regional Cooperation?", are illustrated in Appendix 1. Summarised by a PIA Working Group, they were considered at a special session of the November 2003 State Conference in Brisbane, which passed

unanimously a Conference Resolution urging the Premier of Queensland, the Right Honourable Peter Beattie, to introduce for SEQ:

- 1) regional planning machinery responsible to both state and local governments;
- 2) an enforceable regional plan binding on all levels of government; and
- 3) radically improved methods of regional scale public participation.

Events in the public arena were moving in parallel. In the same week as the Conference, Brisbane's metropolitan daily newspaper announced that the State Government intended to establish a "Department of Growth Management" to coordinate regional planning and protect open space throughout the region. Following the state election in February 2004 and a period of stakeholder consultation, the formation of the new Office of Urban Management was announced in May with Mr. Michael Kerry as its foundation Director. This seminar/workshop thus provided a timely opportunity to review the recent turbulent phase of regional debate, and to propose agendas for a new era of enhanced regional planning in Southeast Queensland.

The seminar consisted of both the guest speaker's topics and a series of eleven facilitated workshops, held in break-away groups of 5-12 people. The groups presented back to the main session on the major challenges to regional planning in each of their theme areas. Both speaker and workshop contributions are summarized in the following five themes.

## **Re-Bootting Regional Planning in South East Queensland: Issues and Seminar Outcomes**

### **Settlement Form**

A number of keynote speakers and workshop participants discussed the issues relating to emerging settlement patterns and strategies to deal with them. There was a general concern about the unplanned growth of SEQ and emergence of a 200 km city from Noosa to Tweed Head. Residential developments in the outskirts of the city are taking place with little consideration for employment or services. One of the key regional challenges, therefore, is managing growth and change in SEQ so that it develops as a sustainable region in the future. Consolidation of settlement form with higher densities around centres and transport nodes could be encouraged to create well planned "urban villages", with easy access to services and public transport. Gary White presented two alternative scenarios of SEQ – Figure 1 being the present unplanned growth of SEQ and Figure 2 being the planned growth around centres and transport nodes.

A workshop on 'Regional Settlement Form, Densities and Infrastructure Provision' coordinated by Dr. Brendan Gleeson cautioned that a regional plan seeking to increase density must ensure it is targeted and delivered in strategic locations rather than a blanket

approach. The group considered how growth could be shared amongst local governments, and identified Ipswich as a new growth pole and regional centre. The workshop also advocated the need for good demonstration projects on transit oriented development with a strong focus on community and public/private partnership.

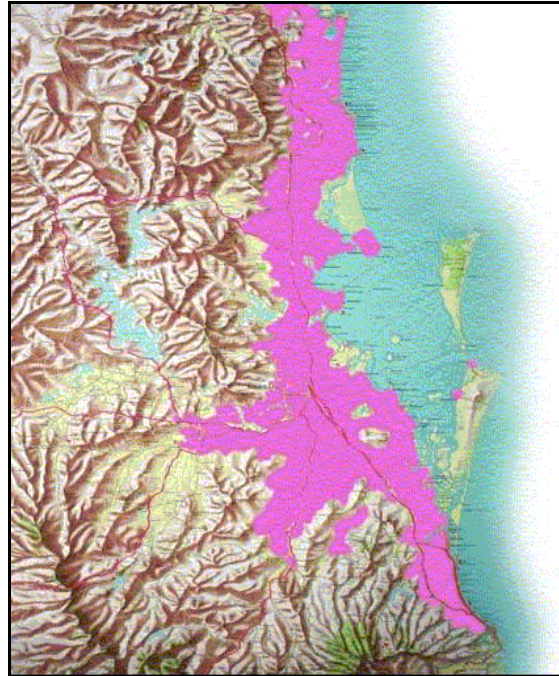


Figure 1: Unplanned growth scenario for SEQ2021. (source: Gary White)

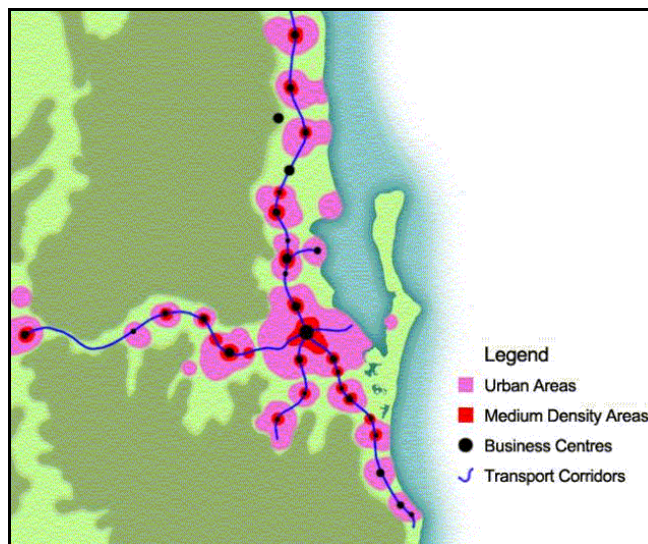


Figure 2: Planned growth around centers and transit nodes (source: Gary White)

Michael Kerry in his address presented a diagram (Figure 3) which could indicate a new way of thinking about settlement patterns in SEQ. Although SEQ is made up of 18 Councils, it does not mean the region has 18 different cities. Rather, there are four key cities – City of Greater Brisbane, City of Sunshine Coast, City of Gold Coast and City of Greater Ipswich.

There should be greater decentralization of employment and services in each of these four cities, unlike the present patterns of Brisbane-centric employment focus. In 1923 a number of local governments were amalgamated to form the current extended Brisbane City Council area. Therefore, another issue that needs consideration is whether similar amalgamation of councils in the Sunshine coast is desirable for sub regional planning in the area.

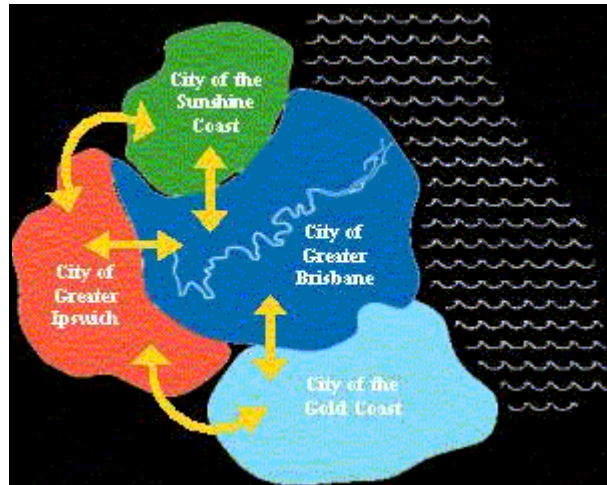


Figure 3: Four city regions of SEQ (source: Michael Kerry)

### Infrastructure Funding

There was a wide-ranging discussion on ways to fund infrastructure. Jim Soorley put forward the idea of using superannuation funds in Australia to fund urban infrastructure. A new community fund such as an “Infrastructure Bank” can be established which can fund infrastructure by pooling together resources from government subsidies and super money, and infrastructure investments from local government. Infrastructure bonds can also be issued to the public to invest in infrastructure. Decisions about spending can be made by reputable financial people so that the infrastructure bank can become self-funding.

The keynote speakers also emphasised the need for governments in future to recoup some “betterment” from profits made by landowners and developers to fund urban infrastructure. Preparation of an infrastructure plan and program/priorities as part of regional planning exercise is another idea that was discussed. It is important that the regional plan has necessary support and force, and must be tied to forward commitments for infrastructure spending.

The workshop theme “Funding, investment and incentives” identified a number of solutions to fund infrastructure in South East Queensland. Some of the ideas that were discussed are:

- 1) develop incentives/policies to encourage private projects to locate in certain locations/places according to a strategic plan;

- 2) introduce more comprehensive infrastructure charges to fund infrastructure; 3) focus capital expenditure into critical projects that deliver best value for money;
- 3) align criteria for treasury funding with planning outcomes; and
- 4) land use bonuses for increased density.

## **Governance**

Governance of the regional planning framework was a dominant theme in the seminar. The statutory authority of a plan, the policy priorities, and the challenges of governance were issues that were raised by the guest speakers and formed themes in the workshops. Governance was viewed as an important element to “re-booting” regional planning primarily because of past “challenges” of regional planning in Queensland.

It was agreed among participants that a regional plan must have statutory authority, that is, be a legal document, and be legally precise, with spatial and policy outcomes clearly articulated. In addition, the plan must be comprehensive, have a strong spatial relationship, and clearly define areas such as urban boundaries, green space, and protected areas. Thus, for growth management, it was argued that a plan must focus on and define locations rather than the more general distribution of growth. A second quality viewed important was that a regional plan needs to be durable and stable, with enough flexibility to consider changes that result in better regional outcomes. In addition to statutory authority, a regional plan should have a cooperative element – not everything needs the force of the law, and many objectives can be implemented and achieved on a cooperative basis.

The regional policy priorities need to be underpinned by quality of life and sustainability principles. Within this context, firm targets need to be set for a coordinated and integrated system of settlement, centres, defined and protected open space, and priorities for infrastructure and public transport. The targets become defined as a series of sustainable regional outcomes that are endorsed and shared by the public. The development of public-private partnerships was viewed as an important policy direction to foster, where tangible outcomes need to be defined for the private sector in order for them to become involved.

Challenges to regional governance stemmed around the concept of “thinking regionally and acting locally”. Primary opportunities and challenges consisted of improving community engagement and including the public in regional governance with an emphasis on alerting people to the importance of regional planning. This included maintaining a partnership with a wide range of stakeholders and putting a “face to regional planning”. At the local level, planning schemes were viewed as important vehicles to implement regional priorities; whereas at the state level, the importance of regional planning needs to be instilled in state government departments. The local and state levels hold different challenges to implementing a comprehensive regional plan.

## **Natural Resources and Ecosystem Management**

The present pattern of development in SE Queensland is changing the regional landscape, and in most cases the impacts of development are negative on the natural environment. In his address, Darryl Low Choy explored the relationships between regional open space, liveability and quality of life. He stated that the clean, green and free elements of SEQ's regional landscape are key to our regional "sense of place". For the community a "free" landscape is not disturbed by the built environment and allows people freedom in movement and recreation. A "green" landscape has high biodiversity values and can also be used for agriculture or nature based recreation. A "clean" landscape has good air and water quality.

A regional response to managing our natural environment is needed to prevent the further fragmenting of natural systems such as wildlife corridors, waterways, and critical ecosystems. One of the key points from the seminar included the need for the State to have a comprehensive natural resource inventory at the regional scale. The objective of the inventory is to provide the basis for integrated planning between state, regional, and local council objectives. An inventory of natural resource assets was considered the first step to identify protected areas, open spaces, and areas of conflict. The regional scale provides a comprehensive approach to implement ecosystem management principles and provide a planning structure to ensure compliance at the local levels.

Regional planning was viewed as the best scale to implement ecosystem management and evaluate ecosystem components in SE Queensland. Certainly, one of the challenges of a regional plan is to protect those components of the natural environment that give this area its liveability, for both humans and wildlife.

## **Transportation**

Jim Soorley argued that the transport agenda is a major challenge in SEQ as the Integrated Regional Transport Plan is not having much impact on reducing the car usage in the region. Both buses and trains have under-utilised potential and need to be effectively coordinated with land use.

The workshop discussing 'Transport and Land Use Integration' came up with a number of suggestions to address transport issues. To improve land use and transport integration, land use bonuses for increased density around stations should be used in conjunction with improvements in security, convenience and reliability of existing public transport. Tax breaks can be provided to developers to encourage higher density development around transit nodes. In new areas, people should be encouraged to work near where they live by providing mixed land uses and free local transport. Government may also consider infrastructure charges to encourage development in certain locations. Some of the other ideas discussed were removing state support for petrol and promoting cycling, especially for peak hour trips.

## Conclusion

Further regional seminars are being organized by the PIA Continuing Professional Development Committee & QUT to review the progress of regional planning both in SEQ and throughout the state. They will be publicised on the PIA CPD website. The next will discuss issues raised by the Consultation Draft of SEQ's first statutory regional plan, released on October 27 and will contribute to the response of the Queensland Division of PIA to the plan and to the work of the Office of Urban Management. In the meantime, the opportunities presented by this energetic re-booting of regional planning should be warmly welcomed by professional planners, academics and the many members of regional- scale interest groups committed to sustaining social, economic and environmental values in all of Queensland's regions.

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**Appendix: Outcomes of the PIA Seminar “Urban Sprawl or Regional Cooperation?”, 15 September 2003**

